

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT RECORD EASTERN INTERIOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Meeting Location: Red Men Hall, Eagle, Alaska

Meeting Date: May 08, 2008

Purpose: Identify public issues and concerns with BLM managed lands in the Eastern Interior Planning Area.

Number of public in attendance: 11

BLM personnel in attendance: Lenore Heppler (Manager), Jeanie Cole (Planning), Darla Pindell (Socio/Economics) and Larry Jackson (Minerals).

Meeting format:

4-6 pm: Open house with maps and other information on display. BLM staff discussed maps with the public and answered questions. The public had the opportunity to review maps of land status, Recreation opportunity spectrum, and OHV designation in the Steese and White Mountain subunits. Attendees were introduced to why we are doing a new RMP, what an RMP does, and given examples of decisions that might come out of an RMP through short presentation. BLM staff answered questions. Participants were asked to express their concerns and issues with BLM-managed public lands.

6-8 pm: Attendees were introduced to why we are doing a new RMP, what an RMP does, and given examples of decisions that might come out of an RMP through a power point presentation. BLM staff answered questions. Participants were asked to express their concerns and issues with BLM-managed public lands.

Handouts: An Interested Party letter explaining the types of decisions made in the RMP and giving an overview of the initial steps in planning was available. In addition, a set of frequently asked questions, copies of the existing RMPs for the Steese, White Mountains and Fortymile, and brochures on the Fortymile management unit and the 17b easement process were available. A scoping comment sheet that could either be filled out at the meeting or returned to BLM at a later date was also available.

Issues/Questions/Concerns:

Firewood and Fuel:

- Allow for personal use firewood and house log harvest and provide access for these activities. Many elderly people in the area depend on firewood in the winter due to the high cost of fuel.

Cabins:

- Include a provision to allow low-impact trapping cabins.
- Make it possible for people to get a permit or a lease for a cabin.
- Some more creative thought needs to be put in on how to allow private individuals to go out there and get limited permits. Maybe a five-year or a 10-year permit or whatever for living in the area and that includes trapping and hunting and whatever and you can limit those so you would only allow a person every 20 or 30 miles on a river drainage or whatever so you do not have to worry about conflicts with creating little communities.
- If people want to go out and try and eek a living with the land out there, they would have the opportunity to do that and that is going away really fast in Alaska. Between Federal lands and Native lands and BLM lands, there's no land left for people to go out that just want to go out – who want to go out and live with the land.
- If you allow permits or leases a trapping cabin or anything like this. It is very important to have certain rules go with it. Because it should be low-impact and it should be regulated so you have control of what is happening. It should be low-key– for subsistence use.
- There is a range of permits that ought to be possible to achieve and some of the permits should allow people to try and live on the land. Give them a two or a five-acre piece of land or a one-acre piece of land just to put a cabin on, permit them for 10 to 20 years and require that they live on that land for more than six months out of the year. That will keep small commercial enterprises and commercialized hunting and trapping operations and things like that out of the picture.
- We also need permits for travel cabins. Winter travel and winter camps or cabins are essential to move around in the countryside. Until 20 years ago there were a lot of cabins in this country that were used regularly by people for traveling and they are gone now and they cannot be replaced. They will not let us build them in the Preserve [National Park lands]. You can work with DOYON but because the lands have not been selected up to this point in time they were pretty insecure about granting permits for those types of travel cabins.
- It is important that any sort of permitting process that you put in place be efficient and streamlined to the point where if a person is applying for a permit, such as a permit for a trapping cabin or a travel cabin, it doesn't take five years to get the permit.
- Canada has a good process for leasing Crown lands – BLM should consider a similar process.
- When people have common interests to get out in the woods, they usually band together and work together to build cabins. So it is not like you are trying to give a permit to one person for ownership of a cabin. It is basically creating a public use cabin. People are willing to go out and put the cabin up and do the work so economically it is very feasible. It does not cost the government any money. You just have to allow permits so that they can obtain the raw materials for the cabins.
- We lost a lot of our cabins because they have been burned with these fires. Most has sled dogs, snow machines, or kids. It is a way to get them out. It is healthy.

Access:

- Access is slowly slipping away from the private individual to go out there and try and do something [like mine or live off the land].
- As far as our community [Eagle] it is not so much that the exploration and the mining or extraction takes place that affects the community. It is the easements and how access is handled. They are going to access the area via planes; they are going to need roads and bridges.

Withdrawals and Mining:

- It is nice to see small Mom and Pop placer mines having a chance to succeed versus the larger operations. These small mines have always been a source of income for people in the state of Alaska. Small mines should be allowed in a safe manner, pretty much how they are doing it now.
- There are an incredible number of environmental laws that we follow, which is a good thing, and on a large-scale operation it can be done. But the small mining operations, it seems in a lot of ways they have kind of got a bad deal, the restrictions part of it on the smaller miners. There are good environmental laws that go along with certain areas and it seems like these laws are being followed by people. But it is sure nice to help the small miner out.
- It is really important that small mom and pop type placer mining be given an opportunity to continue. Safeguards for water quality are all in place.
- Can BLM limit the type of mining claims? If BLM has the ability to create a permit for someone to go in, can they also create limitations on the type of equipment that can be used or the volume of land that they can stake?
- The big concern in this area is oil and gas development or oil shale, that sort of thing and what may come of this community [Eagle] if access easements are given to these operations that would be in close proximity to our community.
- If a bridge was authorized across the Yukon to access Step Mountain or lands in the Eastern Black or for oil or oil shale development, it would have a dramatic impact on this community. It will kill this community from what it is right now. Those are the kind of concerns, which should be addressed in this plan for at least the next 20 years. Because there is a big push for new energy and as the price of oil is going up like this, development is becoming a lot more economically feasible to do.
- Any time mining operations come into an area and access is provided, fish and game in that area are affected dramatically and that would be in direct conflict with the subsistence uses in this area. Without a question, that happens every time you have a large-scale mining operation.
- We do not want to close everyone out but at the same time we want to be cautious about how we open up the land to large-scale operations because that has a bigger impact than anything else. We can handle the small stuff. But the big companies come in and once they are in, you never get rid of them and once a road or infrastructure is put into place, it never goes away. It is there forever and with it comes all of the things that people moved here to get away from. You will hear that echoed by most people who live in these small communities in Alaska. That is why they moved out there.
- BLM needs to consider possible future mining or energy development in the reasonably foreseeable development scenarios – and look that the impacts.

Subsistence:

- Residents have a lot of concerns about the increased pressure from urban hunters, from Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Fort Greely or where ever, flooding into the area and closing the caribou hunt down within the first 24 hours. Fish and Game has authorized some special hunts in the area but use is just going to continue to increase unless some kind of restrictions are put on that hunting area, in the Chicken Ridge area.
- Maybe BLM can limit access by OHVs in certain areas such as Chicken Ridge to reduce hunting pressure [Chicken Ridge trail is on State land – so BLM may not be able to do this].
- Generally speaking, every time a trail is designated that it is for year-around use. BLM should look at designating trails very carefully and consider what impact these trails have on the land and on the resources around it or subsistence resources.
- BLM should consider designating some trails for winter use only. Because winter access is very different. Much fewer people will use winter access and the damage to the ground and environment is very limited.
- If off-road vehicles are allowed in the summer or year-around, then you get into major trouble and here come the invasive plants.
- Access should be looked at very closely because most people really if they want to recreate do not have to go driving for 30 miles on an all terrain vehicle through the countryside.
- We are not providing for young people to go out and try and live that lifestyle anymore [living off the land]. That is really important and it needs to be emphasized in the subsistence aspect of the plan. We just want to go out there, we are not going to do anything harmful, but we want the opportunity. There are a lot of young couples that have this dream of coming to Alaska and living out in the woods. Most of them do not last, but the skills that they gain make them better people when they get involved in other things.
- BLM needs to bring that human element into the discussion on regulations and a very real view of what it takes to go out there and do it. It is a really important cultural aspect to at least have the opportunity to go out and give it a shot.
- We have to work really hard in this area to feed ourselves. We have the second lowest moose population density in the entire state in this region. We have a caribou herd that we are trying to rebuild. I mean, it's coming up but it's slow and that's all due to access, you know, and the growing population in these urban areas and the influx into these regions where there is easy access and that's what we're fighting right now and that's what we're going to fight for the next 20 years.